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ABSTRACT

This booklet is a guide to the report on the "Measuring Up" study of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. "Measuring Up" provides a picture of state postsecondary policy and an overall picture of higher education in the states. The report can help states analyze their strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their progress through the snapshot it provides. The "Measuring Up" report grades six performance categories: (1) preparation; (2) participation; (3) affordability; (4) completion; (5) benefits; and (6) learning. In "Measuring Up, 2002" each state is given an "I" (incomplete) in Learning because there are no good data with which to measure learning at present. Other information is arranged as report cards for the states. How to use the report cards is discussed. It is noted that since "Measuring Up" began in 2000, 30 states have improved in preparation and comparable numbers in other categories, with 49 states improving in affordability. (SLD)

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State Higher Education: Is it Measuring Up?

National Conference of State Legislatures

The Forum for America's Ideas

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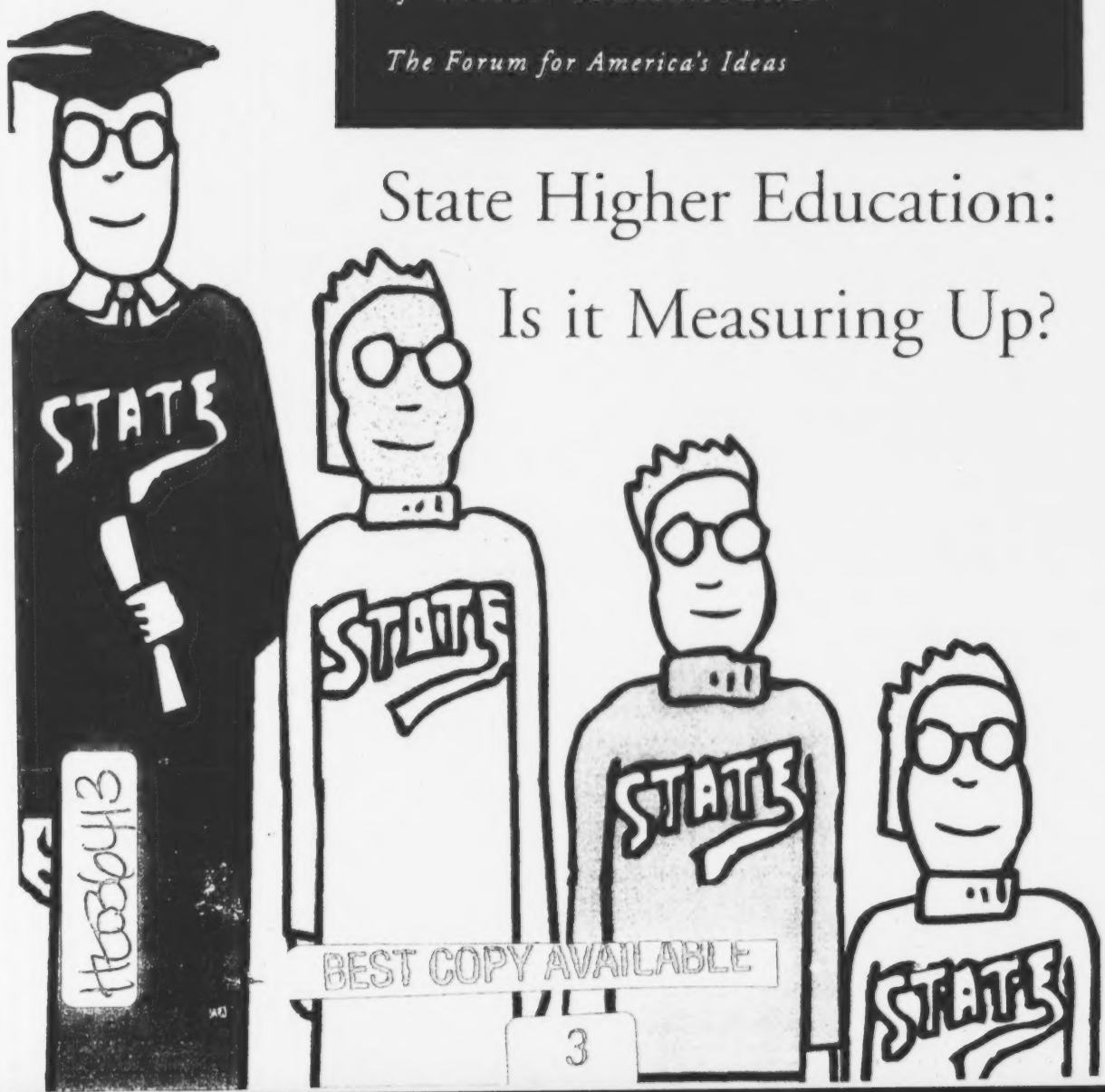

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State Higher Education: Is it Measuring Up?

By
Julie Davis Bell

NATIONAL CONFERENCE *of* STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

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2003

NATIONAL CONFERENCE of STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policy-makers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures,
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The Conference operates from offices in Denver, Colorado,
and Washington, D.C.

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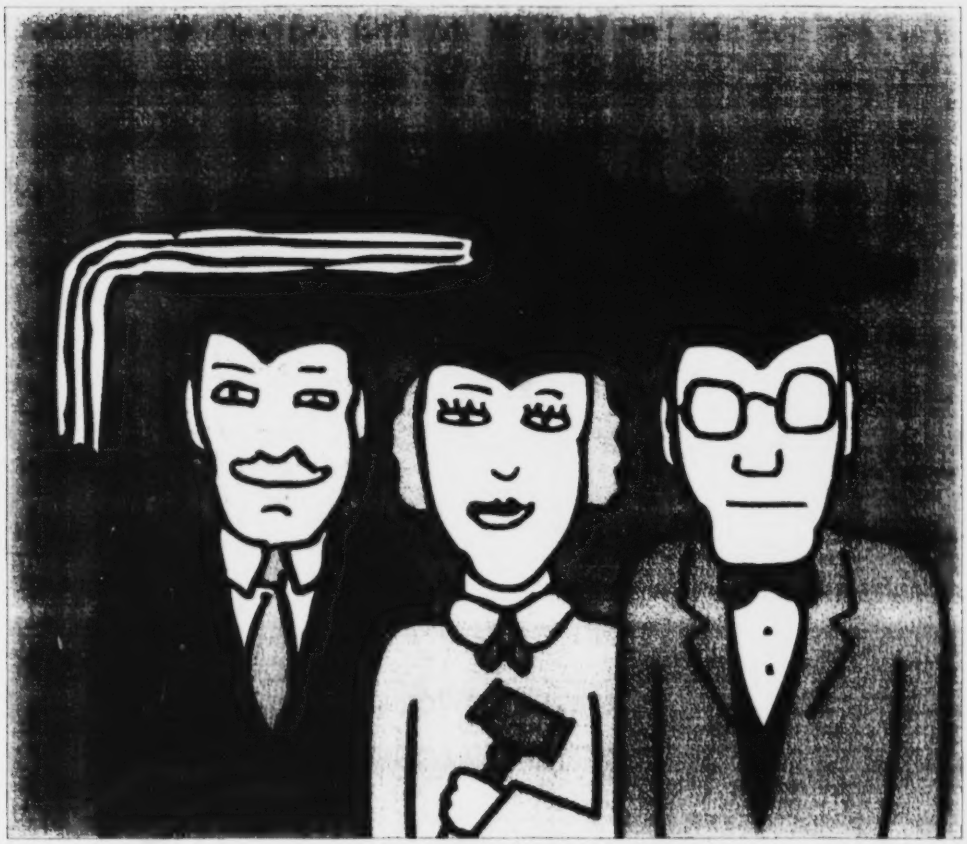
Introduction



State higher education policy is receiving increased legislative scrutiny. It has become clear that the economic "good life" is tied to education, especially post-secondary education. The economic stability of the state is tied to citizens who are employed and productive.

However, not all states are adequately ensuring that students of all backgrounds are prepared to enter post-secondary education; have access to higher education opportunities; can afford post-secondary education; and, once in the system, are receiving a high-quality education.

Consider:

- ☛ The annual income of a worker with a bachelor's degree averages 80 percent higher than that of a high school graduate. Over a lifetime, the gap in earnings between those with a high school diploma and a BA (or higher) exceeds $1 million.

- The demographic distribution of who goes to college and who doesn't is not equal. According to the College Board, only 54 percent of high school graduates from the lowest income families enroll in college, compared to 82 percent of those with family incomes of more than $86,000.

- It has become much more difficult for students from the lowest income families to afford to attend four-year colleges without access to student financial aid.

- States vary considerably in their success in providing post-secondary opportunities. Within states, large gaps exist in the rates of enrollment of young people by ethnicity, family income and level of parents' education.

It is with these concerns in mind that the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education began its research, entitled *Measuring Up*, to study how well states are doing in delivering accessible and quality higher education.

Why this research?

The research is particularly salient for state legislators because it focuses on states, not on individual institutions. *Measuring Up* provides a picture of the success of state post-secondary policy. All the indicators analyzed in *Measuring Up* are things that state policy can cause, control, influence, and improve.

The report provides an overall picture of higher education in the states. Higher education refers to all education and training beyond high school, including information about students attending all public and private two- and four-year, public and private, nonprofit and for-profit institutions. It is intended to measure the results of student experiences in the overall state post-secondary system. The report provides an overall picture of your state's performance in higher education.

The report can help states analyze their strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their progress. It is also a vehicle for comparing states to each other and learning about other state efforts that are successful.

But, I don't trust statistics.

Most state legislators believe in the old adage, There are lies, damn lies and statistics." Most legislators are used to having individuals and groups shape numbers and statistics in a way that is most valuable to their cause. In

Measuring Up, the statistics speak for themselves. You will find indicators that are easy to understand and relevant. You won't find a lot of fancy statistical analyses.

Regardless, we urge you not to get hung up on the statistics, the indicators, the indices, or the weights. Rather, allow this report to offer you some valuable information about how well your state is doing and to serve as a useful tool for helping you capitalize on your strengths and improve on your weaknesses.

What is the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education?

Established in 1998, the NCPPHE is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that conducts policy research and fosters public awareness and discussion of public policy issues that affect education and training beyond high school. The center is not affiliated with any government agency, political party, state, or college or university. The purpose of the *Measuring Up* reports is to stimulate public policies that will improve the effectiveness and accessibility of higher education.

A final comment.

This report is not intended to embarrass or indict any state or state policy. The set of structures and policies that define a state's post-secondary system is the result of many unique factors, including demographics, culture, history and traditions. There are no right answers to any of the questions and issues investigated in *Measuring Up*. There are no single solutions to any of the problems. However, states shouldn't use structure or tradition as an excuse for failing to address shortcomings in their systems. Improvements in student outcomes can result from well-structured state policy.

Above all, consider that this report offers a snapshot of your state—it illuminates issues, highlights strengths, and raises questions. It tells you where you're doing well and not doing well, but it doesn't tell you why. That's how you use the report—to begin your own inquiry and discussion. Let it help you think about your state, evaluate your policies, and begin to identify steps for improvement.

Understanding the Report

Measuring Up has been developed primarily for state policymakers, to help inform them about how well their state higher education systems are doing. The first *Measuring Up* report was issued in 2000. The second, *Measuring Up* 2002, issued in October 2002, provides not only a state-by-state comparison, but also allows states to compare the 2002 and 2000 data to check their progress.

The report grades six performance categories that policymakers generally discuss when evaluating higher education.

Preparation. This category looks at how well-prepared high school students are to enter college.

Participation. This examines the opportunities available for state residents to enroll in higher education.

Affordability. This category examines whether students and families can afford higher education.

Completion. This looks at the degree to which students continue through and complete their educational programs and earn certificates or degrees in a timely manner.

Benefits. This category looks at the economic and societal benefits the state receives as the result of having well-educated residents.

Learning. This is intended to look at the overall results of higher education—the degree to which students are actually learning.

Each category is comprised of several key indicators. The indicators have been selected very carefully —they represent data from national data sources, meaning that the data are available for all 50 states and are comparable for all the states. The report does not report individually collected state data. Here is the data analyzed for each category:

Preparation:
- The degree to which students are enrolled in challenging high school courses, (i.e., math and science).
- The proficiency of high school students enrolled in these courses.
- Participation in college entrance and advanced placement exams.

Participation:
- The rate that high school students go on to college.
- Enrollment levels of traditional aged college students.
- Enrollment levels of working-aged (adult) students.

Affordability:
- Tuition levels relative to family income levels (family ability to pay)
- Availability of need-based financial aid
- Levels of student debt.

Completion:
- The degree to which students return year after year.
- Completion of bachelors degrees within 5 and 6 years.

Benefits:
- Numbers of adults with bachelors degrees and advanced degrees.
- Percent of population that votes, contributes to charity.
- Adult literacy rates.

Learning:
- No adequate indicators.

In *Measuring Up 2002*, as in *Measuring Up 2000*, all states are given a grade of "I," or Incomplete in learning. The reasoning is this: Learning is perhaps the most fundamental result upon which a higher education system should be evaluated, but no state has good data with which to measure learning. Currently, nothing is available that meets the criteria of being a national indicator of learning that compares all 50 states. The indicator is included to encourage states to collect better data to measure this most fundamental outcome.

REPORT CARD

Preparation	A
Participation	C
Affordability	B
Completion	C
Benefits	D
Learning	I

Interpreting the Report

Preparation

In thinking about the preparation of students for higher education, you might ask, "Isn't this more an indicator of the K-12 system than of the higher education system?" Good question! However, the effect of student preparation on the ability of the state's post-secondary system to be successful is extremely important. Most state legislators would agree that it is a significant state priority for students to be prepared to enter college or other post-secondary activities.

To fully evaluate the post-secondary system, states must know what's going on at the K-12 level. How many times have you heard legislators express frustration about the amount of remediation necessary for college freshmen? The colleges pay, as the argument goes, for the deficiencies of the K-12 system. Higher education has a vested interest in the success of the K-12 system and can send signals—for example by admission policies—about what students need to succeed.

States currently are examining many ways to improve student achievement in the K-12 system—including improving teacher quality, providing more choices and more options, setting more rigorous standards, and implementing new assessments. The preparation grade examines several indicators that target high school student achievement, the level of rigorous course taking, and scores on the national assessment of educational progress and advanced placement exams. We know from research that students who take rigorous high school courses and do well in them tend to enroll in and graduate from college in greater numbers than do other students.

Most states do well in ensuring that young people attain a high school diploma or a GED, but large gaps exist in the attainment of different ethnic and income groups within states.

Policy Questions:

Review the grades for your state, then ask some questions:

- How well do college entrance standards align with high school exit standards? Does the state have rigorous requirements for high school graduation? Do colleges require rigorous courses for admission?
- Do all schools have a college preparatory curriculum?
- What is the state of remedial education in your state? How many students require remedial education? What role do community colleges play? How do colleges fund and administer remedial programs?
- Do students have access to instructional experiences that lead to excellent preparation? Are advanced placement courses available? Are advanced math and science courses offered? Can students complete the full range of core courses at their high schools? How do these offerings differ by location in the state? Does your state offer dual enrollment and dual degree programs?
- Which students are performing particularly well or poorly on measures of preparation? How does performance differ by county, urban or rural location, race or ethnicity, and family income?
- Are policies in place to ensure that highly qualified teachers are in the classrooms? Are teachers teaching in their areas of expertise?

Participation

When state legislators talk about access to educational opportunity, they are referring to participation. This category examines whether residents of all ages have sufficient opportunities to enroll in education or training beyond high school.

Participation is an important category for assessing post-secondary education, but one that is difficult to separate out from other categories, specifically affordability and preparation.

Several important policy levers affect participation. First and foremost is the cost of college. This is examined in depth in the next indicator, affordability. Clearly, the link between cost and participation is clear and significant. So, too, is the link between preparation for college and participation in college. We have just looked at indicators of preparation and do not mean to ignore the contribution improving preparation can make to improving participation.

Rather, the specific indicators of participation examined here involve tracking and understanding the pathways between high school and college and, for adults, between work and ongoing education and training. It also involves assessing the kinds of programs, institutions and opportunities that are available.

In many states there is a growing for-profit sector that is filling some of the gaps of public institutions and offering students more options and choices. Some may

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offer specific training programs that are not offered elsewhere. Others involve technology such as on-line learning or other flexible learning opportunities.

Policy Questions:

Review the data for your state, then ask some questions:

- What are the patterns of high school to college transition in your state? For example, what percentage of students in your state go straight to college from high school? Are different populations of students represented in these numbers? For those students who do not go straight to college, do they return to college?
- For working age adults (ages 25 to 49) what proportion are enrolled in education or training beyond high school?
- Are all qualified and motivated students provided with an opportunity to enroll?
- How does participation vary by important student characteristics such as geographic location, race or ethnicity, and family income?
- How does participation in different institutional sectors (two-year, four-year, research, regional etc.) and major fields of study vary by important student characteristics?
- How dependent is the state on other states to provide access to higher education?
- How do participation rates of older, part-time students compare with rates in other states? How do they vary within the states?

Affordability

When students and families share with you their concerns about how much it costs to attend college and how difficult it is to quality for student financial assistance, they are talking about college affordability.

The price of a college education has been steadily and dramatically rising during the last decade. According to The College Board, average tuition and fees charged by public four-year colleges and universities rose 9.6 percent in 2002-03, Tuition at private four-year institutions rose 5.8 percent and tuition at two year institutions grew 7.9 percent.

During the 1980s, the price of attending college rose more than three times as fast as median income, while student aid grew slowly. College prices continue to grow relative to median family income. Student debt is a growing concern for families and for policymakers, because less grants are available, and students have relied more on loans to finance the high cost of college. During the past 20 years, the affordability problem has increased for all families except the most wealthy and has significantly affected the lowest income students and families.

Legislators play an important role in determining the price of college. In tough fiscal times, states that are facing budget deficits often choose to trim higher education budgets—this is because higher education, unlike prisons and Medicaid, has revenue sources (i.e., tuition) available to make up costs. Ironically, because of these economic forces, the cost of college often goes up at the time when students and families can least afford to pay more.

A major development in recent years has been the popularity of non-need-based financial aid, or merit-based aid. States are choosing to support merit and need, and some states are finding an appropriate balance between the two. Regardless of a state's philosophy toward student aid, the rising cost of college is of great concern to students and families and, if not addressed by state policy, can result in a significant number of citizens who are unable to attain post-secondary education opportunities. Increasingly, students and families are relying on loans to finance college costs. According to the NCPPHE, loans account for nearly 60 percent of federal student aid, an increase of about 15 percent during the last 20 years. A significant shift nationally has occurred regarding the amount of borrowing.

Policy Questions:

Review the grades for your state, then ask some questions:

- Does your state have a formal philosophy about the relationship between tuition and student financial aid? Do you agree with that philosophy?
- What kinds of gaps exist between income groups regarding family ability to pay for college?
- What are the costs of attendance for students relative to their ability to pay? How does this compare with other states?
- To what extent is student aid directed toward low-income students—rather than toward students who have special abilities (need versus merit-based?)
- To what extent are students and families in your state relying on loans? How does loan burden vary by income level?

Completion

State legislators often hear about how it takes longer to complete a college degree these days. One major reason many students are taking longer to graduate is that, because of high college costs, they must work and can attend school only part-time.

Legislators have reason to be concerned about time to degree, persistence and completion rates. First, because in-state tuition rarely matches the costs of educating a single student, the state subsidizes students in post-secondary education. It costs the states more to educate a student whose completion takes

five, six, or even seven years. It also costs money to educate those students who are unable to complete their degrees.

Another interesting trend has been the post-secondary path that many students now follow. It is not the traditional pattern of attending college directly after high school and graduating with a bachelor's degree four years later. Rather, more students attend multiple institutions during their post-secondary experience. For example they may begin in a community college and later transfer to a four year institution. It is important to investigate these patterns to understand how the state's post-secondary system is serving the needs of its citizens.

Policy Questions:

Review the data for your state, then ask some questions:

- What percentage of your students complete their degrees? What percentage of your students complete their degrees from four-year institutions in four years? In five years? In six years?
- Which sectors of higher education exhibit particularly high or low rates of persistence and/or completion?
- How do persistence and completion rates vary by student characteristics such as race or ethnicity, gender, major field of study, and academic standing?
- How does degree production—by level of degree and field—compare with that in other states?
- What factors might influence low persistence and graduation rates?
- What are the characteristics of student flow from one type of institution to another in the state?
- What factors are associated with differing times to graduation?
- What is the relationship between high school academic performance and college persistence and completion?

Benefits

Legislators are increasingly concerned about the return to the state of the investment in higher education. Thinking about support to higher education as a state investment is a reasonable way of evaluating state higher education policy. One way to look at this is to examine the benefits to the state of a well-educated population. *Measuring Up* examines this question in several ways. The first assumption is that the state benefits from a population of adults with bachelor's degrees or higher. We already have seen the economic benefits to students, families, and the state associated with college completion. We also know that individuals of higher income contribute more to charities and are more likely to vote and be involved in civic affairs.

Policy Questions:

Review the data for your state, then ask some questions:

- Is the state importing or exporting college graduates?
- How is the state's economy changing? Can it absorb the graduates of the higher education system? Does it demand graduates that the higher education system is not producing?
- How do high school and college wage differentials compare with those in other states?
- What concerns do employers have about college graduates (for instance, in terms of the number of graduates, workplace skills, and their ability to apply knowledge)? Do these concerns vary in relation to the institutional sector from which the students graduated?
- How does the state rank with regard to various quality-of-life measures, such as health measures, incarceration rates, and the indicators published in *Kids Count*?
- Is the state participating in the knowledge-based industries of the new economy?

Student Learning

Legislators often argue that the ultimate indicator of the success of the state's higher education system ought to be how well students are learning. During the last few years, many states have put in place new higher education accountability systems that link performance (i.e., student achievement) to funding.

It is difficult to argue with this notion. However, states and institutions do not yet have adequate systems to monitor and collect information on student learning. Because of the importance of student learning to evaluating a state's post-secondary system, *Measuring Up* has defined this as a major indicator upon which states should be graded. However, because of the lack of good information to measure this indicator, *Measuring Up* has given all states an incomplete on student learning.

Policy Questions:

- What is the state's overall investment in post-secondary education?
- Do students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the postsecondary system of the state?
- Do graduates of the postsecondary system have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in entry-level jobs?

What to Do With This Report

The first step in using this report is to thoroughly look at the grades for your state. Ask yourself if the grades make sense to you. What grades surprise you? What grades don't you understand?

Try to get at the story behind the grades. Where your grades are good, figure out what you're doing well. Where your grades are poor, try to understand why. Try to get at the root of the problem.

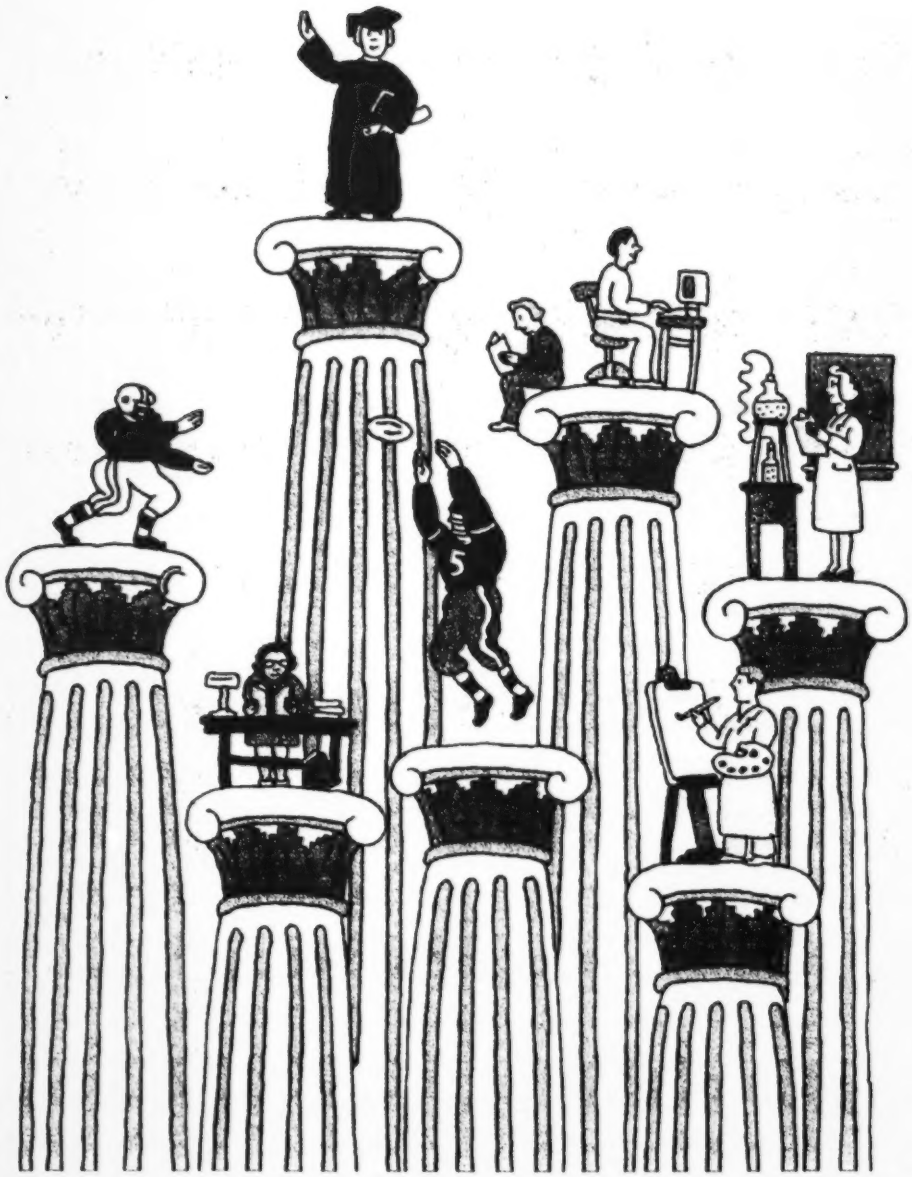
Here are some of the ways legislators around the country are using the report to figure out their state story and to make things happen.

❶ Ask questions. Legislators often underestimate the power of simply asking questions. Call your state higher education agency, your governing board and your institutions. Ask them to explain things you don't understand.

❷ Get more data and information. Make a list of the questions you have and the things you don't know. Probe—find out what the data is hiding. What differences in subpopulations are there? How are certain citizens being affected differently? Have a staff person or agency person give you answers to your questions or provide more information. Check out the resources for additional information that are included in this book. Call NCSL for help.

❸ Discuss the results for your state with various policymakers and stakeholders. Talk with people in your state. Talk with people in other states.

❹ Begin small, focused conversations about particular indicators. Meet with student groups on affordability issues. Talk with faculty groups about completion and student learning. Bring together K-12 and higher education representatives to discuss preparation. Talk with business leaders about their needs.



❺ Become an expert on your state's policies and programs. Conduct a systematic review of existing policies. Know what's on the books. Know where you have gaps and duplication.

❻ Examine policy options. Look at the states that received high grades in *Measuring Up*. Find out what they are doing. Call the education chair or legislative staff person in that state and talk about state experiences. Call NCSL.

❼ Sponsor a summit on higher education. Call together the members of the education committee, the state board of regents, presidents of institutions, business leaders and the governor. Use the *Measuring Up* data to focus conversations about state priorities, state problems and state advantages.

Now, use the information and knowledge you have developed to make a difference for higher education in your state. In state after state, legislators have exhibited the leadership to establish policy agendas and reform systems. Here are some techniques they have used.

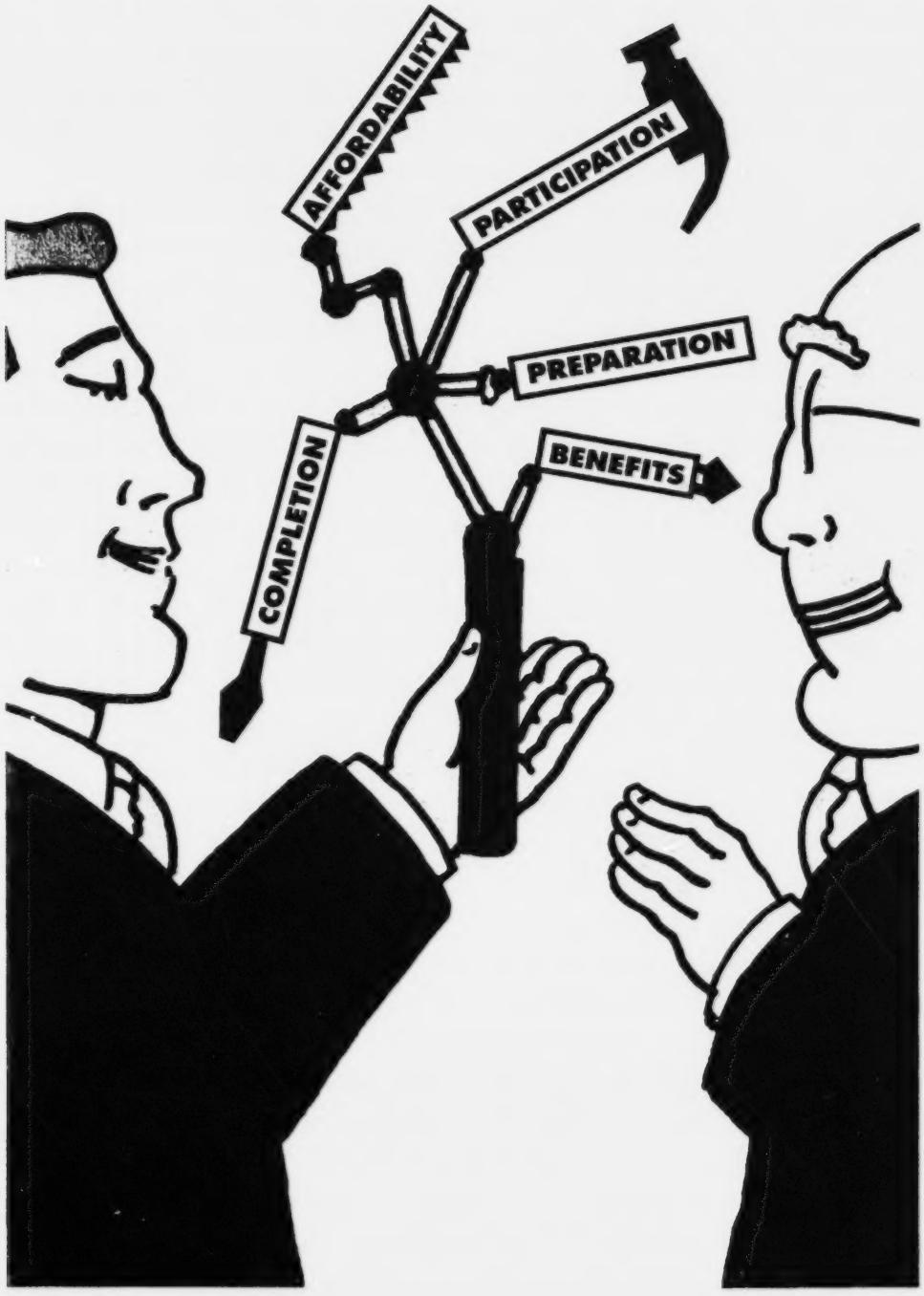
❶ Use the bully pulpit. Legislators know well how to bring public attention to issues. Students and families are ready for political leadership on state higher education policy. Become a champion. Let the public know why improving the state's educational performance should be a priority.

❷ Identify shared goals. Develop a policy agenda. In collaboration with the many stakeholders in your state, develop short-term and long-term agendas for state higher education policy.

❸ Bring people together. Help stakeholders build consensus around the goals, agenda and the vision for higher education.

❹ Conduct a policy audit to see if current policies are aligned to goals. Identify what needs to be changed.

❺ Develop the policy environment that supports that vision. Use the legislative process to build the pieces that support the vision.


AFFORDABILITY
PARTICIPATION
PREPARATION
BENEFITS
COMPLETION

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Making Progress

Changing results and outcomes takes attention and dedication. It isn't always easy to turn performance around, but it is rewarding. *Measuring Up* gives states the tools to track progress.

As noted earlier, the first *Measuring Up* study was published in 2000, the second in 2002. The National Center is committed to publishing at least two more versions, one in 2004 and one in 2006. The purpose of the repeated reports is to encourage states to think about improvement. Very simply, each state's results on the indicators in *Measuring Up 2000* are compared with the results on the indicators in *Measuring Up 2002*. Each indicator is examined to see if state performance improved or declined.

Since *Measuring Up 2000*,

30 states have improved in preparation.
30 states have improved in participation.
41 states have improved in affordability.
26 states have improved in completion.
29 states have improved in benefits.

Improvements are scattered across states. No one state shows across-the-board improvements. Clearly, some improvements may be difficult to note after only two years, but movement in a positive direction is a positive sign. This study gives you the resources to watch trends over time and provide you with the information you need to evaluate the potential success of new policies.

Contact NCSL if you:

Need help interpreting your scores;
Want additional data, information and/or resources;
Want someone to participate in statewide meetings; or
Want to know more about what other states are doing.

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Resources

The College Board. *Trends in Student Aid.* Washington, D.C.: The College Board, 2002.

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_____ *Purposes, Policies, Performance: Higher Education and the Fulfillment of a State's Public Agenda.* San Jose, NCPPHE, 2003.

Patrick Callan. *Coping with Recession: Public Policy, Economic Downturns and Higher Education.* San Jose: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002.

Institute for Higher Education Policy. *Accounting for State Student Aid: How State Policy and Student Aid Connect.* Washington, D.C.: IHEP, 2002.

Other Places to Find Data

Check out the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's Web site at www.highereducation.org. You can examine your state or compare your state to others on a number of key indicators.

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems has developed a Web Site at www.higheredinfo.org. This site has state-by-state information on indicators used in *Measuring Up*, as well as data on other relevant topics such as higher education funding.

You also will find helpful and relevant state-specific information at:

- Your state department.
- Your state higher education commission and/or coordinating board.
- Individual institutions.

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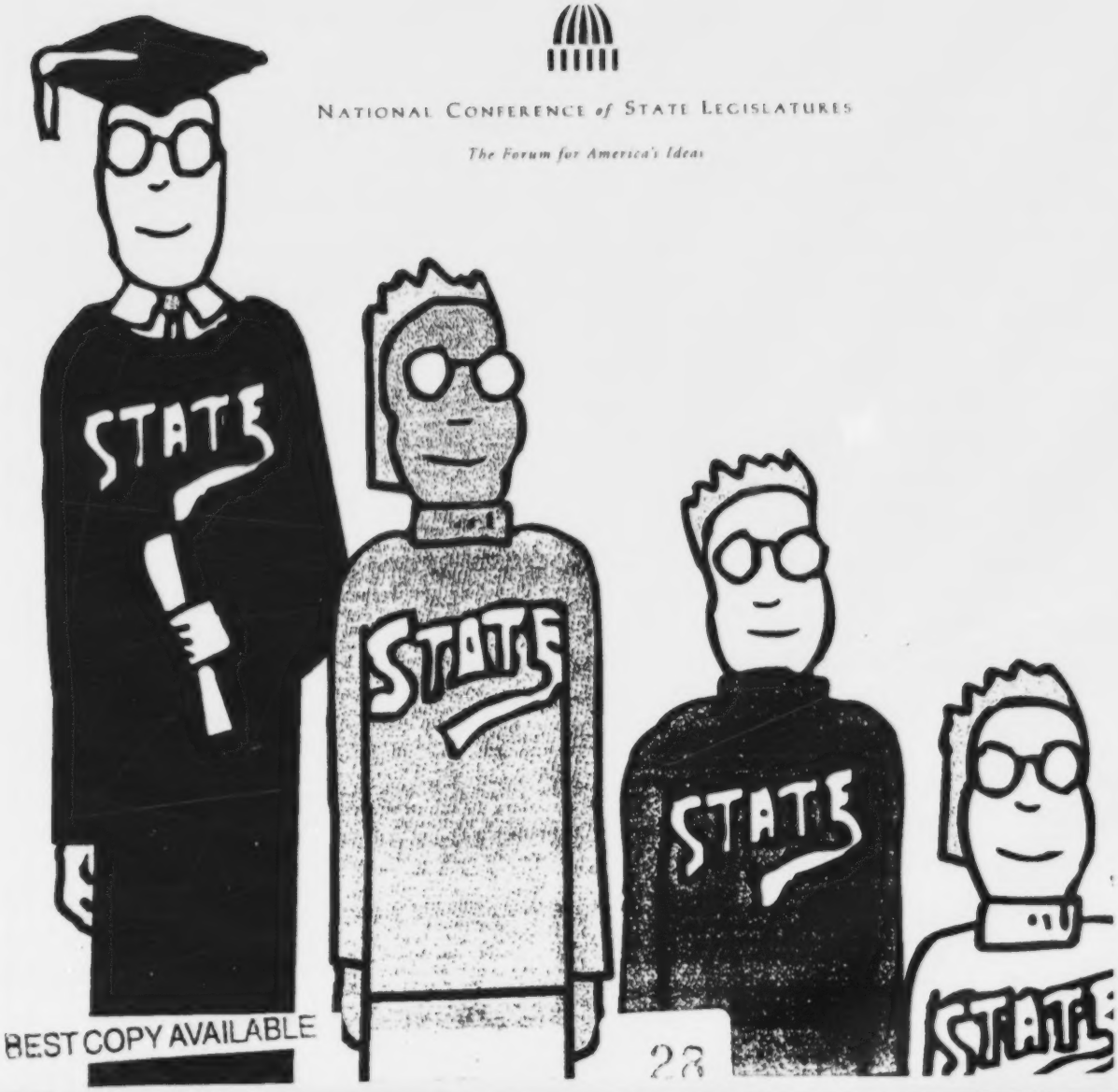

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